
Hospitality Curricula Strategies and Acquisition of Industry Skills Among Graduate Employees: Exploring the Moderating Role of Perceived Obstacles in Kenya

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doi.org/10.51505/ijaemr.2025.1304

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.51505/ijaemr.2025.1304>

Received: July 12, 2024

Accepted: July 31, 2024

Online Published: July 25, 2025

Abstract

This research aimed to investigate the impact of implemented techniques in undergraduate hospitality curricula on the acquisition of industry-specific skills among graduate employees in the hospitality sector. Additionally, it attempted to examine how perceived obstacles affect this relationship. A total of 168 surveys were obtained from a sample of 185 graduate employees in the hospitality industry, specifically those working in four- and five-star-rated hotels located in the counties of Mombasa, Kilifi, and Nairobi City. The findings indicated that hospitality graduates had a pessimistic view of the effectiveness of strategies used by hospitality educators while delivering hospitality curricula. The findings suggest a negative correlation between the implementation of hospitality undergraduate curriculum techniques and the acquisition of industry-specific skills. Moreover, it was discovered that perceived obstacles in the curriculum had a moderating effect on the relationship mentioned above. This finding implies that hospitality graduate workers who faced more barriers in their educational pursuits were less likely to develop the essential competencies needed for successful employment in the hospitality sector. Hospitality educators are recommended to enhance their curriculum by focusing on effective teaching methods and addressing the challenges associated with implementing hospitality curricula. This action will help students better prepare for a career in the hospitality sector.

Keywords: Acquisition of industry skills, hospitality undergraduate curricula, hospitality graduate employees, hospitality undergraduate curricula strategies, perceived obstacles.

1. Introduction

The hospitality industry is considered a catalyst for social and economic change and one of the most flourishing economic sectors globally. According to the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO), the hospitality industry is expected to record approximately 1.8 billion international tourist arrivals by 2030 (UNWTO, 2022). International tourism rebounded to 88% of its pre-pandemic levels in 2023, driven by robust pent-up demand. Following a significant

recovery in 2023, it is anticipated that foreign tourism will return to pre-pandemic levels in 2024 (UNWTO, 2022). Similarly, the hospitality industry in Kenya experienced significant growth in 2022, driven by a substantial increase in the number of foreign tourists visiting the country. The number of international visitor arrivals rose from 871.3 thousand in 2021 to 1,541.0 thousand in 2022 (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics [KNBS], 2023). In addition, Kenya experienced a 4.8% increase in gross domestic product in 2022, compared to a growth rate of 7.6% in 2021, primarily due to the improved performance of the hospitality and tourism industries. With a predicted growth of international tourist arrivals, the hospitality industry remains vital in terms of employment and revenue generation.

Given the sustainability challenges the hospitality industry faces, hospitality academia recognises the need to review hospitality management curricula to prepare tomorrow's hospitality workforce (Alexakis & Jiang, 2019). Griffin (2020) observes a gap between the knowledge imparted to hospitality learners and the skills acquired among graduates of hospitality management programmes. Similarly, Ghosh and Jhamb (2021) highlight the incongruity between the expected and available skilled workforce in the hospitality industry. Furthermore, hospitality educators should enhance their curricula to better prepare students for hospitality careers, further highlighting the gap that exists between the skills imparted to students and what the industry expects in terms of skills (Kabii et al., 2019; Wen et al., 2018).

The significance of establishing a mutually beneficial partnership between hospitality professionals and academics has been emphasised by several studies, owing to the pivotal function fulfilled by the sector (Anderson & Sanga, 2019; Anthony et al., 2023; Griffin, 2022). The constant evolution of the hospitality sector necessitates that hospitality academics adapt to these changes to satisfy the industry's expectations. Regrettably, the hospitality sector in Kenya lacks a sufficient number of suitably educated and trained personnel to meet the demands of the hospitality employment market (Kabii et al., 2019). The lack of coherence in the field of hospitality education and professionals has necessitated the strategic realignment and synchronisation of hospitality curricula and standards to align with market requirements (Ndiuni & Baum, 2021). Matching training to employers' expectations in the industry has been the biggest challenge for trainers and hospitality employers (Anderson & Sanga, 2019; Anthony et al., 2023; Griffin, 2020; Kabii et al., 2019). The primary difficulty faced by trainers and hospitality educators is aligning training programmes with the industry's expectations (Anderson & Sanga, 2019; Anthony et al., 2023; Kabii et al., 2019). Recent studies have cast doubt on the efficacy of strategies employed by hospitality educators in equipping students with the necessary skills for success in the hotel sector's labour market (Anderson & Sanga, 2019; Anthony et al., 2023).

Considering the information mentioned earlier, there is a dearth of evidence on how the strategies used by hospitality educators affect the acquisition of industry skills, despite several research attempts to bridge the gap between hospitality education and industry cooperation. Further, numerous studies addressing the aforesaid gap between industry and academia in terms of skills gaps have been carried out in developed nations such as Malaysia (Ismail et al., 2022), Nepal (Lamichhane & Neupane, 2022), India (Ghosh & Jhamb, 2021), China (Wen et al., 2018),

the United States (Gibbs & Slevitch, 2019), and the Philippines (Talavera, 2022). These studies raise concerns about the generalizability of their findings. In addition, research conducted in Kenya has examined the skills gap from the viewpoints of hospitality managers (Kabii et al., 2019) and the impact of the hospitality curriculum on the provision of high-quality training, as shown by a case study conducted at a specific institution (Mathenge et al., 2022). Studies in Kenya have seldom examined the impact of strategies used by hospitality educators on the acquisition of industry skills from the viewpoint of hospitality graduate employees. The present study is an attempt to fill these gaps and also introduce perceived hospitality undergraduate curricula obstacles as a moderator in the relationship, as mentioned above, to enhance the understanding of the underlying mechanism and to provide valuable insights to hospitality educators regarding the impact of the employed tactics on the acquisition of skills among students.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Hospitality Undergraduate Curricula Strategies and Acquisition of Industry Skills

The importance of skilled hospitality graduates with suitable skills throughout the hospitality industry is related to the nature of strategies employed by various institutions of higher learning that provide hospitality management undergraduate curricula. Research has demonstrated that hospitality educators adopt many methods to deliver hospitality management curricula effectively. However, there is no uniformity in the standards employed by many institutions, and one strategy does not fit all (Alexakis & Jiang, 2019). On this note, Jiang and Alexakis (2017) conducted a study comparing students' and managers' perceptions of essential entry-level management competencies in the hospitality industry of the Southwest Florida region in the United States. The findings revealed that hospitality educators evaluated and adjusted their curricula to ensure that students received the necessary knowledge about the hospitality industry and were provided with the technical concepts to prepare them for successful entry into the industry. The study indicated that quality customer service was the most critical skill for hotels, restaurants and resorts in the hospitality industry. The universities were trying to ensure that their students acquired the necessary skills in customer service for the hospitality industry. Additionally, the study revealed that to be a leading producer of knowledge, many colleges help students gain valuable skills that prepare them for success in the workplace. The study recommended that the sensitivity and awareness of the hospitality industry's skills needs, as well as the expectations of students and individual graduates, should evolve to reflect the changing needs of the industry.

Özgit and Çağlar (2016) examined the efficacy of the tourism and hospitality management programmes in the professional careers of graduates in North Cyprus. Specifically, the study examined the effectiveness of the education the graduates received from the tourism and hospitality management undergraduate programmes in the universities of North Cyprus. Contrary to the assertion by Jiang and Alexakis (2017) that hospitality management curricula should provide quality customer service skills, the findings of Özgit and Çağlar (2016) revealed that developing academic knowledge was a significant factor in the graduate careers of

hospitality management students. However, real-life experiences needed to be shared during their education by establishing stronger cooperation between higher education institutions and the industry. The study recommended that higher education institutions consider the industry's needs regarding their programmes, curricula and qualifications gained by their graduates. Additionally, the study suggested that higher learning institutions offering tourism and hospitality management programmes develop strategies to improve their relations and cooperation with tourism sector stakeholders, thereby educating sector-ready graduates.

Lee et al. (2019) evaluated factors influencing career choices among college students majoring in hospitality management at 4-year accredited universities in the United States. The participants demonstrated that lecturers' enthusiasm during teaching and their ability to provide current information and regular updates on trends and developments in the hotel sector were crucial in ensuring that they were equipped with knowledge and information, and thus played an integral role in influencing their career decisions. The study concluded that faculty expertise is crucial for guiding students to internships in the right places, according to students' priorities and qualifications. The study recommended that faculty assist students with a well-developed academic curriculum and real-life experience. The perspectives of industry professionals significantly influence the development of tourism programs for educators to provide tourism education, thereby meeting the needs of the tourism industry. Therefore, tourism and hospitality management programmes must provide a relevant curriculum for quality education in the industry.

Dellova (2019) assessed student workplace competency and industry outcomes-based assessment in selected higher education institutions offering tourism and hospitality courses in the Philippines. The study addressed every practitioner to determine the competency of tourism and hospitality students in selected higher education institutions. The study employed a descriptive design, targeting 363 industry practitioners. The study's findings revealed that private and public hospitality institutions employed strategies that provided students with competencies in customer focus, teamwork, planning and organisational skills.

In addition, Anthony et al. (2023) investigated the factors influencing the intentions of hospitality undergraduate students to pursue careers in the hospitality industry in Ghana. They revealed that industry experience is not a significant predictor of career choice among hospitality undergraduate students, contrary to the findings of Amissah et al. (2019) in Ghana and Wen et al. (2018) in China. Amissah et al. (2020) explored students' perceptions of a career in the hospitality and tourism industry and their intention to pursue a career in the same field in Ghana. Their study observed that industry experience is a significant determinant of career choice among hospitality students. Similarly, Wen et al. (2018) investigated the predictors of intentions to pursue a career in the hospitality industry among Chinese students. They compared the perceptions of students in their third and fourth years of study. The study revealed that previous industry work experience was among the factors that predicted career intentions.

2.2 Moderating Role of Hospitality Undergraduate Curricula Obstacles in the Nexus Between Efficacy of Hospitality Undergraduate Curricula and Acquisition of Skills

Previous studies have demonstrated that several obstacles impact the effectiveness of hospitality undergraduate curricula. For example, prior research has revealed the overuse of passive learning techniques by hospitality educators. On this note, a qualitative study by La Lopa et al. (2018) among educators, who were drawn from three of the top 10 rated hospitality programs in the United States, noted that many hospitality educators employed passive learning, an ineffective technique for ensuring effective student learning. Additionally, the study found that the use of technology was even lower among hospitality educators who used active learning to facilitate student learning. Additionally, the results of La Lopa et al.'s (2018) study revealed that hospitality educators who had effectively employed active learning had successfully addressed barriers to transitioning from passive learning. However, they were uncertain whether active learning would increase in hospitality curricula in the future, further highlighting the overuse of passive learning techniques.

Another challenge facing hospitality programmes is an increased focus on managerial rather than practical skills. On this note, Hsu and Li (2017) investigated the effectiveness and frequency of use of learning methods and tools among hospitality students in Hong Kong. In their study, hospitality students perceived internships and practical skills as highly effective yet underutilised by hospitality institutions. They noted that the hospitality curriculum has limited curriculum space and a tight scheduling of courses, making it impossible to complete additional formal internships and practicals within a four-year period. However, practical skills and internships are not always perceived as essential attributes of career readiness among undergraduate students in the hospitality field. On this note, Lee et al. (2022) examined the characteristics of career readiness among hospitality students enrolled in a four-year university program in the United States. They found that hands-on learning and practical experience had an insignificant impact on the perception of hospitality students' career readiness. The study found that the design of the hospitality curriculum was crucial, as students placed great emphasis on a well-organised curriculum for their education.

In addition, inadequate use of technology by hospitality faculty during lessons has been revealed as a challenge towards the effectiveness of hospitality programmes. In the same vein, Huang et al. (2022) conducted a systematic review of the literature examining instructional technologies in hospitality and tourism education articles published in journals related to educational technology in these fields. Cost and constrained budgetary allocations were revealed as factors contributing to the underutilisation of technology in teaching among hospitality educators.

McCowan (2018) examined the barriers to enhancing the quality of higher education in Kenya. The study observed that higher institutions of learning in Kenya, including those providing hospitality undergraduate programmes, faced significant challenges in the form of inadequate staffing (i.e., high student-to-faculty ratio) and infrastructural resources, poor governance and pedagogical culture (especially related to approaches to teaching, curriculum and assessment) thereby recommending a three-faced response comprising policy and practice reforms which must concurrently address the material conditions of universities, the forms of institutional organisation, and the cultural relations of teaching and learning.

A study by Foley and Masingila (2013) indicated that large class sizes were the most evident manifestation of poor-quality higher education in Kenya. According to the study, while there was extensive debate in educational research on the effect of class size on student performance, there was little doubt that classes of many hundreds, without appropriate facilities and support activities, made learning extremely difficult for students. Along similar lines, Mwirichia et al. (2017) examined the impact of massification on the academic participation of lecturers and students among public and private universities in Kenya. Their study revealed that lecturers and students had poor academic involvement due to a high student-to-lecturer ratio. The results of the reviewed studies have shown numerous challenges facing the administration of hospitality undergraduate curricula. However, their results, despite the majority being conducted in developed nations, are inconsistent. Drawing inferences from the reviewed studies, it is likely that the challenges mentioned above could moderate the relationship between the effectiveness of hospitality undergraduate curricula and the acquisition of industry skills, as seen through the lens of hospitality graduate employees in the industry. Subsequently, this research introduced hospitality undergraduate curricula obstacles as a moderator in the relationship between the efficacy of hospitality undergraduate curricula and acquisition of industry needs among hospitality graduate employees to boost an understanding of the underlying process.

3. Method

3.1 Research design and study population

The study employed a cross-sectional survey research approach, in which data were gathered and analysed using quantitative methods. The study was carried out in Kilifi, Mombasa, and Nairobi Counties in Kenya. The participants included 344 hospitality graduates employed in four- and five-star-rated hotels. The total number of participants was obtained from human resource managers and chairpersons of hospitality departments in three public universities.

3.2 Sample Size

The data for this research were gathered from hospitality graduate employees in four- and five-star rated hotels located in the counties of Kilifi, Mombasa, and Nairobi in Kenya. The sample size was determined using Yamane's (1963) method based on the target population data. The formula resulted in a sample size of 185.

3.3 Research Instruments and Measurement

This research utilised an online survey generated and hosted using Google Forms. The questionnaires consisted of four parts: the first part included participants' personal information; the second part included questions aimed at gathering data on the strategies used by educators in the hospitality field; the third part included questions assessing perceived gaps in undergraduate hospitality curricula; and the fourth part focused on the acquisition of skills necessary for success in the hospitality industry. This section encompasses eleven skills considered crucial for the hospitality industry. The present study employed a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*).

3.4 Data Collection Procedures

The research was done between June and August of 2023. The participants consisted of hospitality graduate employees working at star-rated hotels located in Nairobi, Mombasa, and Kilifi counties. Convenience sampling was considered to select hospitality graduate employees working in classified hotels. The target population of hospitality graduate employees constituted a specific subgroup that was more readily accessible than the broader graduate population. Therefore, convenience sampling allowed the researchers to efficiently identify and reach participants who were both relevant and available (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Besides, the irregular working hours and shift-based staffing patterns in the hospitality industry (Baum, 2008) made it challenging to implement a fully randomised sampling strategy. Convenience sampling helped address these operational difficulties by providing flexibility in identifying participants during field visits (Saunders et al., 2019). Data from the participants was collected using two methods: a traditional pen-and-paper survey and an online survey questionnaire. A pen-and-paper questionnaire was administered to hospitality graduate employees at hotels that permitted physical data collection by well-trained hospitality students. A manual data collection was carried out at a total of 10 hotels, namely two in Kilifi County, six in Nairobi City County, and two in Mombasa County.

The second alternative involved administering an online survey generated and hosted using Google Forms. The process included reaching out to and sending invites to human resource managers of hotels that allowed for online data collection. The email invitation included a link to engage in the survey and an informed consent document for participants. The document outlined the survey's aims, participants' rights to participate and withdraw, as well as the guarantee of confidentiality and privacy rights. To ensure precise engagement, human resource managers were instructed to share the link only with hospitality graduate employees and encourage them to complete and submit their surveys online. A total of 191 surveys were filled out and submitted by hospitality graduate employees. Following the exclusion of 23 incomplete questionnaires, the final sample consisted of 168 participants, resulting in a response rate of 88.0%.

3.5 Data Analysis

Categorical data were analysed using descriptive statistics, namely frequencies and proportions, to summarise the profiles of the samples. The research employed hierarchical linear regression to examine the influence of strategies employed by educators in the hospitality field on the acquisition of industry-specific skills and to investigate the moderating effect of perceived obstacles in the hospitality curriculum on the relationship between these strategies and the acquisition of industry-specific skills. Statistically significant findings were obtained at a significance level of 0.50. The data were analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences, SPSS® (version 27.0).

All assumptions of linear regression were studied and verified. The skewness results ranged from -1.55 to 1.92, while the kurtosis results ranged from -5.22 to 6.89. These findings indicate that the latent scales used to measure perceived tactics, hospitality curricula obstacles, and acquisition of industry skills fall within acceptable ranges. Specifically, the skewness values are within the

limits of 2, and the kurtosis values are within the boundaries of 7. These scores confirmed that the assumption of normality holds, as stated by Hair et al. (2010).

4. Results, Discussions, and Conclusions

4.1 Sample Profile

As shown in Table 1, 66.7% of the respondents were female. Additionally, the majority of these respondents were below the age of 30 (72.6%), worked as waiters or waitresses (59.8%), and had less than 2 years of work experience (57.7%).

Table 1: Socio-demographic Profile of Hospitality Graduate Employee Respondents

Profile	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	56	33.3%
	Female	112	66.7%
Age	Below 30 years	122	72.6%
	30 to 39 years	36	21.4%
	40 to 49 years	7	4.2%
	50 years and above	3	1.8%
Work experience	Below 2 years	97	57.7%
	5 to 7 years	36	21.4%
	Over 7 years	35	20.8%
Job position	Waiter/Waitress	100	59.8%
	F&B Manager	17	9.8%
	Chef	23	13.7%
	Front Desk Agent	7	3.9%
	Front Office Manager	3	2.0%
	Guest Relations Officer	5	2.9%
	Housekeeping Supervisor	3	2.0%
	Sales Executive	7	3.9%
Accounts Manager	3	2.0%	
Total		168	100.0%

4.2 Perceived Acquisition of Industry Skills

The results of the perceived acquisition of industry skills are reported in Table 2. The data indicates that the average score for the perceived development of hospitality industry-specific skills is 4.21. The participants in the study reported acquiring eight specific skills from their courses in the hospitality industry. These skills include good hygiene practices (4.68 ± 0.47), teamwork (4.57 ± 0.64), proper personal grooming (4.55 ± 0.54), appropriate work ethics (4.34 ± 0.48), adequate time management (4.30 ± 0.59), positive attitude towards work (4.30 ± 0.66), multi-tasking (4.28 ± 0.70), and professional code of conduct (4.20 ± 0.73). Nevertheless, the survey participants expressed doubt about attaining proficient communication skills (3.53 ±

0.54), problem-solving abilities (3.49 ± 0.47), and sufficient practical skills (3.05 ± 0.72). These results suggest that the hospitality curricula were not adequately addressing these essential skills.

Table 2: Perceived Acquisition of Industry Skills

Industry Skill Need	Mean	SD
Adequate practical skills	3.05	0.72
Professional code of conduct	4.20	0.73
Appropriate work ethics	4.34	0.48
Proper time management	4.30	0.59
Good communication skills	3.53	0.54
Positive attitude towards work	4.30	0.66
Proper personal grooming	4.55	0.54
Good hygiene practices	4.68	0.47
Teamwork	4.57	0.64
Problem-solving	3.49	0.85
Multi-tasking	4.28	0.70
Overall Mean Score	4.21	0.92
Notes: $N=168$. SD = Standard Deviation. Scale (Range of Mean Score): 1= <i>Strongly Disagree</i> (1.00 – 1.79), 2= <i>Disagree</i> (1.80 – 2.59), 3= <i>Neutral</i> (2.60 – 3.39), 4= <i>Agree</i> (3.40 – 4.19), 5= <i>Strongly Agree</i> (4.20 – 5.00)		

4.3 Perceived Hospitality Curricula Strategies

The findings of the participants’ responses are shown in Table 3. The data reveals that the average score was 2.63, with a standard deviation of 0.68. This finding suggests a degree of uncertainty regarding the effectiveness of the tactics employed by hospitality educators in managing the undergraduate curriculum in the hospitality field.

Table 3: Descriptive Results of Prevailing Hospitality Curricula Strategies

Statements	Mean	SD
Regular engagement between the university and the hospitality industry employers	2.43	1.17
The university has hired qualified academic staff	3.51	0.59
Periodical review of the hospitality curriculum to fit the current hospitality industry	3.49	0.89
The university invites employers from the hospitality industry during curriculum reviews	2.08	1.25
The university enhances partnerships with the hospitality industry	2.51	1.16
Overall Mean	2.58	0.68

Notes. $N = 168$. $SD =$ Standard Deviation. Scale (Range of Mean Score): 1 = *Strongly Disagree* (1.00 – 1.79), 2 = *Disagree* (1.80 – 2.59), 3 = *Neutral* (2.60 – 3.39), 4 = *Agree* (3.40 – 4.19), 5 = *Strongly Agree* (4.20 – 5.00)

Despite reports from hospitality graduate employees indicating that universities have hired qualified lecturers ($M=3.51$, $SD=0.59$) and conducted regular reviews of the hospitality undergraduate curricula to match the current demands of the industry ($M=3.49$, $SD=0.89$), these reviews did not include practitioners from the hospitality industry ($M=2.08$, $SD=1.25$), which is consistent with the findings of Gardini (2018). In addition, hospitality graduate employees observed a lack of regular interactions between hospitality educators and industry professionals ($M = 2.43$, $SD = 1.17$), which aligns with previous research emphasising the importance of close collaboration between hospitality institutions and practitioners in curriculum review to ensure its efficacy (Anderson & Sanga, 2019; Gryphon, 2022).

4.4 Perceived Hospitality Curricula Obstacles

The findings obtained from the survey responses are shown in Table 4. The average score for the perceived difficulties encountered by hospitality undergraduate curricula was 4.03 ($SD = 0.98$), demonstrating consensus among the participants about the challenges faced by these programmes. The participants identified five primary obstacles that were considered very important. These obstacles include unequipped classrooms for active learning ($M=4.38$, $SD=0.99$), limited resources for practical training preparation ($M=4.36$, $SD=0.83$), large class sizes that hinder practical learning ($M=4.22$, $SD=1.03$), a focus on managerial skills rather than practical skills ($M=4.18$, $SD=0.97$), and a negative psychological attitude among students towards hospitality as a course ($M=3.94$, $SD=0.86$).

Table 4: Descriptive Results of Obstacles Facing Hospitality Undergraduate Programs

Statement	Mean	SD	MR
A focus on managerial rather than practical skills	4.18	0.97	4
Inadequate funding to support the hospitality programmes in the university	3.89	0.99	6
Low number of lecturers to students	3.45	1.01	9
Limited resources to plan for adequate practical training	4.36	0.83	2
Ineffective teaching methods	3.77	1.10	8
Overuse of passive learning by lecturers	3.36	0.84	10
Large class sizes that inhibit practical learning	4.22	1.03	3
Unequipped classrooms for active learning	4.38	0.99	1
Inadequate use of technology by lecturers during lessons	3.88	0.89	7
Negative psychological attitude among students towards hospitality as a course	3.94	0.86	5
Overall Average Score	4.03	0.98	

Notes. $N = 163$. SD - Standard Deviation. MR- Mean Ranking. Scale (Range of Mean Score): 1 = *Strongly Disagree* (1.00 – 1.79), 2 = *Disagree* (1.80 – 2.59), 3 = *Neutral* (2.60 – 3.39), 4 = *Agree* (3.40 – 4.19), 5 = *Strongly Agree* (4.20 – 5.00)

4.5 Correlation between Perceived Hospitality Curricula Strategies and Acquisition of Skills

The correlation data, presented in Table 5, demonstrate a negative association between the prevalent tactics used in hospitality undergraduate curricula and the development of industry skills, with a correlation coefficient (r) of -0.517 and a p-value of 0.037.

Table 5: Nexus Between Prevailing Curricula Strategies and Acquisition of Industry Skills

Variables		Existing Curricula Strategies	Acquisition of Industry Skills
Existing Strategies	Pearson Correlation	1	-0.517*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.037
	N	168	168
Acquisition of Industry Skills	Pearson Correlation	-0.517*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.037	
	N	168	168

Note. *. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Based on Cohen’s (1988) criteria for evaluating the strength and size of correlations, which are categorised as weak ($0.10 < r < 0.29$), moderate ($0.30 < r < 0.49$), and high ($0.50 < r < 1.0$), the correlation coefficient in the current research may be classified as high. A likely reason for this discovery is that the methods used by hospitality instructors to deliver undergraduate courses may be intended to enhance students’ mastery of essential management skills for the hospitality industry. Nevertheless, individuals who have graduated from hospitality programmes have conveyed unfavourable judgements about the efficacy of the tactics used to manage the hospitality curriculum.

4.6 Moderating Role of Perceived Curricula Obstacles on the Nexus between Hospitality Undergraduate Curricula Perceived Strategies and Acquisition of Industry Skills

The study employed a hierarchical linear regression analysis, following Baron and Kenny’s (1986) guidelines, to investigate the moderating effect of a moderator. The findings are shown in Table 6. To enhance the understanding of the regression parameters, the predictor variable and the moderator were both mean-centred.

Table 6: Moderating Effects of Obstacles Facing Hospitality Curricula

Variable	Step 1: β (p-value)	Step 2: β (p-value)	Step 3: β (p-value)
Perceived curricula strategies	0.454**(0.009)	0.371***(0.000)	0.335**(0.005)
Perceived curricula obstacles		-0.284***(0.000)	-0.274***(0.000)
Perceived curricula strategies x Obstacles			-0.157*(0.011)
R^2	0.334	0.457	0.488
ΔR^2 (change in R^2)		0.123**	0.031**
ΔF	7.138**	72.543***	44.321**
Notes: Dependent variable: Acquisition of industry skills. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$			

The first step of the model consisted of a single predictor, namely the perceived tactics used in university courses for hospitality. The findings from Step 1 indicate that the tactics employed in the undergraduate curriculum for hospitality studies had a substantial impact on the development of industry-specific skills ($\beta = 0.454$, $p < 0.01$). The inclusion of an additional predictor, namely perceived obstacles in the undergraduate curriculum related to hospitality, resulted in a significant improvement in the Step 2 model ($\Delta R^2 = 0.123$, $p < 0.01$). This finding indicates that the moderator variable played a substantial role in predicting the acquisition of industry skills ($\beta = -0.284$, $p < 0.001$), while also accounting for the influence of perceived strategies in the undergraduate curricula related to hospitality.

In addition, the Step 3 model included an interaction term, which is the product of perceived hospitality undergraduate curricula strategies and curricula obstacles. This interaction term significantly improved the model, with an increase in R^2 of 0.031 ($p < 0.01$). This coefficient indicates that the interaction effect explained an additional 3.1% of the variation in the predicted acquisition of industry skills. Controlling for the strategies and obstacles in hospitality undergraduate curricula, the interaction term was found to have a significant impact on the acquisition of industry skills among participants ($\beta = -0.157$, $p < 0.05$). Therefore, the perceived hospitality undergraduate curricula obstacles encountered had a moderating role in the association between the perceived hospitality undergraduate curricula tactics and the acquisition of industry skills among the participants. Furthermore, the study investigated the correlation between the perceived strategies of the hospitality undergraduate curriculum and the acquisition of industry skills at both “low” (-1SD) and “high” (+1SD) levels of the moderator. Figure 1 depicts the conditional slopes that represent the correlation between the perceived strategies of hospitality undergraduate courses and the acquisition of industry skills, taking into account the different degrees of the moderator.

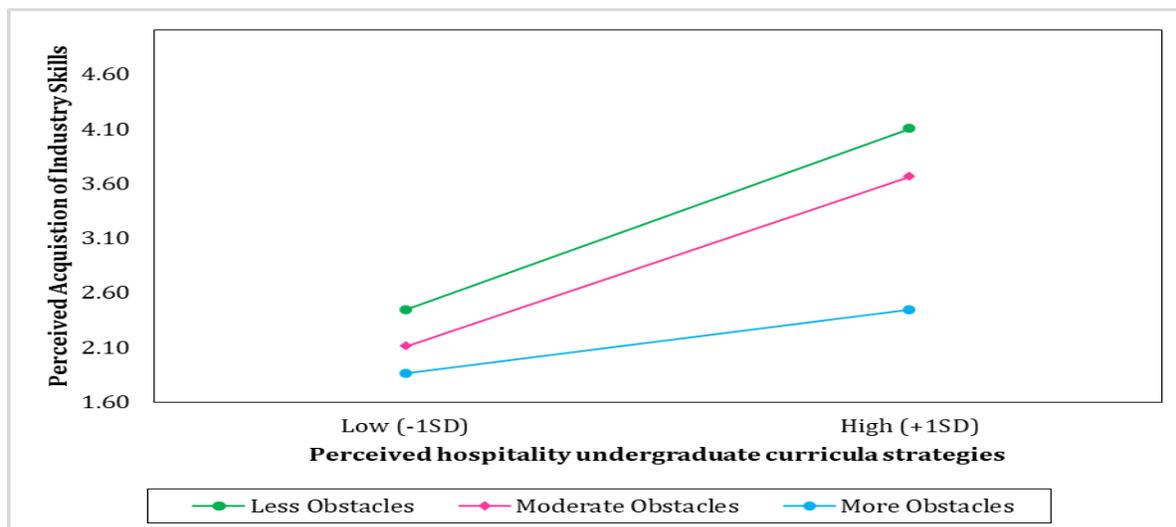


Figure 1: Impact of Perceived Hospitality Undergraduate Curricula Strategies on the Acquisition of Industry Skills at Levels of the Moderator

Figure 1 demonstrates that obstacles in the perceived hospitality undergraduate curricula hinder the favourable correlation between perceived hospitality undergraduate curricula strategies and the acquisition of industry competencies. Examining the conditional effect plot reveals that the correlation between the perceived hospitality undergraduate curriculum techniques and the acquisition of industry abilities was diminished to a greater extent at high (+1SD) values and to a lesser extent at low (1SD) values of the moderator. Therefore, in line with the conclusions drawn from prior research (Huang et al., 2022; Lee et al., 2022; La Lopa et al., 2018), it may be inferred that hospitality graduate workers who encountered more barriers in their educational pursuits were less inclined to develop the necessary competencies required for successful employment in the hospitality sector.

5. Implications for Practice

The research revealed that the tactics used by hospitality educators in teaching hospitality curricula had an adverse effect. The results of this research may be used by hospitality educators to improve the existing hospitality curriculum and teaching methods, hence enhancing the quality of graduates who are well-suited to the demands of the hospitality industry. Additionally, the impact of perceived challenges in the hospitality curriculum was shown to influence the connection between perceived curriculum methods and the development of industry-specific abilities. Therefore, hospitality educators can utilise this discovery to tackle the challenges associated with the implementation of hospitality curricula. This strategy can be actualised by prioritising practical skills over managerial ones, securing sufficient funding for hospitality programmes, recruiting additional lecturers to accommodate the larger student population, providing resources for effective practical training, implementing active learning methods, incorporating appropriate technologies, and tackling negative psychological attitudes among students towards hospitality as a course.

6. Suggestions for Future Research

Although this study has made noteworthy contributions, there are recommendations for further research. The survey data were only obtained from hospitality graduate employees employed in four and five-star hotels located in Mombasa, Kilifi, and Nairobi City counties. Future researchers can expand their data collection to include various segments of the hospitality industry, such as themed restaurants, fast-food restaurants, fine-dining restaurants, Airbnb, and lodges. Additionally, future studies can consider including hospitality workers with diploma and certificate qualifications from different categories for comparison of results. These comparisons would provide details on contextual variations in training needs and perceived obstacles, allowing for exploration of geographical and sectoral differences in graduate employees' readiness. Furthermore, future researchers may use a longitudinal strategy to analyse a more comprehensive dataset that accurately represents the perspectives of hospitality graduate employees about the acquisition of industry-specific skills in the hospitality sector. This endeavour would provide insights into the long-term impact of curriculum strategies on industry relevance.

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